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## CORRESPONDENCE.

### The A. O. U. Check-List.

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

*Dear Sirs:*—I have been much impressed with Dr. Coues's arraignment of the arrangement of our present Check-List—having felt for some time its deficiencies, but scarcely daring to hope for its improvement. While, of course, aware of the real difficulties in the way and the clash of opinions that must arise when the anchors are raised, I believe that there is a call now not only for a rearrangement of the genera and species in many places, but that, in some instances, this should extend to the families—just possibly to an order or two.

With our present sequence of orders, many of the families, as they now stand, express a propinquity or continuity of kinship that is not always the sequence of the probable development; and the question may arise in some minds, which of these two relationships is the more important. But in most cases the interests may both be as well or better expressed by the newer arrangement. Thus in the Paludicolæ, while the Rallidæ are certainly the lowest or nearest the *Apteryx* and the Podicipidæ, yet in our linear arrangement they are not contiguous to either of these groups; but since they precede the Limicolæ, their high position in their own order places them rightly as the next of kin to this order above. While this may seem a rather 'natural' gradation the position of the Jacanidæ in the Limicolæ, viewed from either standpoint, seems preposterous, when we recall how Ralline is its structure. If we had in our North American birds any of the many connecting links that lie between the Limicolæ and the Herodiones, the Jacanidæ might be crowded away from the lower edge of its order by the stronger claims of these; but our presumption is that our list expresses the best sequence of our own birds.

But in the Gallinæ just the opposite thing may be thought to prevail. Following the Peristeropodan line of kinship, the Cracidæ might remain on the Columban edge of this order; but this certainly very much embarrasses the evolutionary order in the Gallinæ, and since the Peristeropodes are a very erratic branch, we might as well run the relationship from the Tetraonidæ around through the American genera *Geotrygon* and *Starnenas* (not having the Old World connecting links) and thus properly rearrange the generic sequence in the Columbæ. Within many orders, as the Raptores, the present order need not be disturbed.

Touching the sequence of families in the Passeres, it is doubtful if any agreement could be had. Notwithstanding the low indications of their tarsal envelopes, I should like to see the Alaudidæ, as indicated by Sharpe, placed nearer the Fringillidæ and Motacillidæ, but I presume there are many who would not consent to it.

With regard to the genera — especially in these Passerine families :— If the Icteridæ are to precede the Fringillidæ (which with the Corvidæ low down seems inevitable) then surely *Dolichonyx* and *Molothrus* should be at the end of their family rather than at the beginning; and with the Tanagridæ naturally following, some rearrangement of the general heterogeneousness seems necessary in the grosbeaked Fringillidæ at least. In some families, also, the present sequence seems fairly natural, as in the Mniotiltidæ.

As Dr. Coues has said, our numbers are mixed and our method clumsy. Something much better can be gotten up — especially with a view to interpolation. Rearrangement would also give us a chance to give the genera a revision in the light of our newer knowledge — with possibly a touch or so upon the families. For my part, because of striking differences in form and habit, I would like again to see the Mimidæ free from the Troglodytidæ — believing slightly in some revision being reversionary, yet progressive.

Very truly yours,

Mexico, Mo.

JAMES NEWTON BASKETT.

TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

*Dear Sirs:*—Dr. Coues's Article, 'The most General Fault of the A. O. U. Check-List,' in the April 'Auk' forcibly calls to mind a remark my father made when the first Check-List came out, *viz.*, that it was like removing the pole of a wagon to the rear axle and leaving the seats as they were before.

I have not had an opportunity to compare opinions on the subject of late years with ornithologists but to express my humble opinion, it seems to me that but one course remains and, as Dr. Coues so ably expresses it, that the "Check-Lists now extant be officially cancelled and formally repudiated in the near future."

It seems to me this can not be done any too soon, as we must come to it eventually.

Also, when this sequence of genera, species, etc., has been rearranged, let a host of various subspecies be subjected to the most rigid examination, so that the presence or absence of a certain shade of color, a spot or a streak here or there is not made sufficient basis to found a subspecies on.

*Milton, Wis.*

LUDWIG KUMLIEN.

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## NOTES AND NEWS.

ROBERT HOE LAWRENCE, an Associate Member of the American Ornithologists' Union, died at Danville, Ill., on the 27th of April, 1897. For a number of years he was a frequent contributor to 'The Auk.' In 1892 he published an account of the birds of the Gray's Harbor region (Vol. IX, 1892, pp. 39-47, 352-357), where he had spent almost a year in one of the dense forests of Washington.

Mr. Lawrence was a son of DeWitt C. Lawrence, of New York, and a grandson of Richard M. Hoe. He was born in New York, October 16, 1861. From his early boyhood he showed a great love of nature and out-door life. Much of his life he had spent in travel, and for the last seven years he had lived on the Pacific Coast, in Washington, Oregon, and Southern California.

Always a lover of nature, he became in his later years especially interested in ornithology. He was drawn to the study of birds by his love of music and his sense of beauty. His trained ear found in the notes of birds suggestions of the themes of Beethoven, Schubert, and Chopin, his favorite composers. He had besides a strong feeling for art and letters; but what endeared him to his friends and makes his memory precious was his faithfulness to his ideals of true and pure manhood.

PROFESSOR EDWARD DRINKER COPE died at his home in Philadelphia, April 12, 1897, at the age of nearly 57 years, he having been born July 28, 1840. In his death science has lost one of the greatest naturalists America has yet produced. As a vertebrate zoölogist and palæontologist, the world has seen few that can be ranked as his equal. Although not especially recognized as an ornithologist, as he published little on recent birds, he is known to have possessed, and on occasions displayed, a profound general knowledge of the class, and to have had a good field knowledge of the birds of eastern North America. In other departments of vertebrate zoölogy he has long been recognized as one of the highest authorities, especially in reptiles, both recent and extinct, while his contributions to mammalian palæontology have been almost unrivalled. He is also the author of several epoch-making schemes of classification, including especially one of fishes, and is properly recognized as one of the chief founders of the Neo-Lamarckian school of evolutionists, of which he was one of the most able exponents. He was gifted with a powerful